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AUTHOR Scovel, Thomas
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ABSTRACT

The field of English as a second language (ESL) has developed rapidly in recent years, but some problems have emerged, including overzealous research on language acquisition, disintegration of classroom practices, and dissolution of common goals by the supposedly competing needs of ESL and EFL (English as a foreign language). Currently popular language learning models are used to the virtual exclusion of alternative approaches. Methodologists advocate new techniques, but they are applied without coherence or cohesion. Teachers new to the ESL field should look carefully at all that is available to them before jumping on a methodological bandwagon. By examining the results of experience, by experimenting in the classroom, and by cherishing research they can grow in professional confidence and competence and pass these qualities on to the students. (MSE)

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A BRAVE NEW WORLD FOR TESOL

Thomas Scovel
San Francisco State University

> "Oh wonder! How goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! Oh brave new world, that has such people in it!"
>
> Miranda, from *The Tempest*

From the outset, I want to devote my special attention to those who are relatively new to the field of TESOL. I am not so naive as to expect a plethora of Mirandas among you, but I do hope you already sense the vibrant spirit of our organization. I also hope you have already become personally acquainted with some of the marvelous people who make each regional or annual convention a colorful marketplace of ideas and individuals. From the towering talents of a Henry Widdowson to the ebulliant energy of a Carole Urzua, you will find Texas-size hearts and ten-gallon intellects. This is no Camelot however; our organization and our profession have grown at a rate which rivals Houston's, and as I look back on the last decade or two, I see problems emerging – problems which are potentially insidious for the newcomer. There has been an overly enthusiastic dissection of language acquisition by many scalpel-wielding researchers; there has been a disintegration of classroom practices, precipitated in large measure by conflicting methods; and there has been a dissolution of our once common goals by the supposedly competing needs of EFL vs. ESL situations. Let me be a bit more specific with my disquiet.

For an example of problems from our research community, we need simply to turn to the most popular model propounded at the moment – Krashen's (1981) second language acquisition model, which dichotomizes all activities as either acquisition or learning. Personally, I think we researchers have not done an effective enough job educating the general membership of TESOL about other models. There are attractive alternatives to Krashen's paradigm that are not given enough visibility by the research community. I am thinking here of the well-articulated four component model that McLaughlin et al. have profferred in a recent *Language Learning* article (McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod 1983).

As for the disintegration of classroom practices, I think we can place much of the blame on methodologists. We find a lot of cuisinaire rods, role plays, and total physical responses in our classrooms, but little cohesion and coherence. Function and communication are often perceived to be in, but form and language are

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Thomas Scovel, Associate Professor at San Francisco State University, has trained EFL teachers in Thailand and China. He is a longstanding member of TESOL.

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frequently perceived to be out. In the words of a current John Lennon hit, released posthumously, "There's always something happening, but there's nothing going on." Jack Richards put it perfectly in his plenary address to the Toronto TESOL convention when he said, "The important issues then are not which Method to adopt, but how to develop procedures and instructional activities which will enable these objectives to be attained. This is not a question of choosing a method, but of developing a Methodology" (Richards 1983: 17).

And as for the teaching of English in places like Great Britain, Canada, and the United States as opposed to EFL, newcomers to TESOL are often left with the feeling that differences between the two situations far exceed any similarities. Sometimes, it takes a snuff of humor to deflect our attention to the possibility that ESL and EFL are essentially unitary. I recall, for example, the amusing sentence one of my ESL students at San Francisco State penned in a composition class, but I emphasized that the same errors emerge all the time in the compositions of EFL students abroad. Asked to describe a local foreign restaurant, she wrote, "At Ota Fuku Tei a customer is *severed* in a very nice, traditional Japanese way!"

Again, let me reiterate that I perceive these fragmentary views as especially dangerous for newcomers to the field, not necessarily for the experienced veterans of our profession, so to those of you who do indeed find this field "a brave new world," take some time before you jump on a bandwagon. Alan Maley said it well at another plenary when he talked about the need for time to transpire for change to take place. Take time, and be as wise as serpents; better yet, be as careful as porcupines making love.

What are some alternatives to the divisiveness in our field which I have just catalogued? What is right in our profession? Specifically, what is right in research, in classroom practices, and in the twin areas of EFL and ESL? I realize, of course, that some of you would prefer not to look at research at all. Perhaps you side with Earl Stevick who has been cited as claiming that it was biologically impossible for him to do research—as implausible for him as having a baby. Others of you may look to research as a drunk looks for a street light—not for illumination but for support! Finally, there may be others who approach research like another drunk who started to look for his lost car keys. He had dropped them in a dark area of the pavement but was on his hands and knees, searching for them a good twenty yards away under the street light. When a curious stranger pointed out that he was searching for them in the wrong place, the drunk replied, "I know, but it's light over here!" All of us need the illumination that good research can provide, and whatever its manifestation, all of us must acknowledge its salient role in our profession—as support, yes, but even more, for the light it sheds on our discipline. There are two kinds of research that can be beneficial for any teacher in our profession.

First there is the voice of experience. If we search and re-search our own experience or that of our fellow professionals, and if we undertake this enterprise honestly and openly, we are conducting a kind of research. This process must be rigorous and systematic, and it must be free from preordained conclusions. Several of the plenary talks at the Houston Convention represent this experiential approach: Alan Maley, Thomas Jupp, John Oller, and Shirley Brice Heath summarized their systematic, experiential conclusions about topics of common concern to us all. Classroom teachers often ask researchers the somewhat vexing

question, "And how's that going to help me in my class this Monday morning?" Let me put the shoe on the other foot – what is something you as a classroom teacher can do for research in our profession this Monday morning? What experience can you glean from your own teaching that will contribute in some way to your colleagues' work? You might want to employ a new technique you picked up from a workshop and apply it carefully and thoughtfully to your class next week. After a period of time, make an honest assessment – was it useful? Why/why not?

But there is another way to re-search issues as well, and that is through experiments. The issues of *TESOL Quarterly* and *Language Learning* are replete with excellent examples of experimental research, so you need not venture far to encounter illustrations. I am sure my friends in the profession who consider themselves experimentalists each have a favorite article or study, but my personal choice is so winsome, I have shared it many times before in public. Based on the early work of Schachter and Celce-Murcia on the possibility that English learners unconsciously avoid target structures in English which differ markedly from their mother tongue, Howard Kleinmann (1977) pursued a clever experimental strategy to discover whether Spanish and Arabic learners implicitly avoided syntactic structures in their second language which contrasted with their first language. Spanish, for example, has no exact equivalent of the English expression, "You asked her to close the door," although Arabic does. Unlike both English and Arabic, Spanish does not employ the accusative, but uses an embedded clause in the subjunctive – something akin to "You asked that she should close the door." Conversely, Arabic, unlike either English or Spanish, has no genuine passive but uses another means to topicalize objects. Thus, "The car was struck by the bus," is expressed in Arabic by something like, "As for the car, the bus struck it." Using little role plays and pictures, Kleinmann interviewed an equal number of Spanish and Arabic EFL students under identical conditions and ended up with appealing experimental support for his hypothesis that EFL students will unconsciously avoid L2 structures that are not found in their native tongue. That is, Spanish speakers avoided "her to close the door" phrases, although Arabic speakers didn't; and Arabic speakers avoided passive sentences in English, though these were not eschewed by the Spanish speakers. I have gone into some detail here, but the reward for paying attention to this study is found in two delightful anecdotes which represent, to me, an experimental epiphany.

One of the Spanish subjects was shown a picture of a bus striking a car, and Kleinmann then asked her in English, "What happened to the car?" Recall that since Spanish and English are similar here, no avoidance was predicted. Sure enough, the woman took a deep breath and blurted out, "The car was – I don't know what the past participle of *strike* is – by the bus!" In contrast to this Spanish student, an Arabic subject displayed a completely different response. After being shown the same picture and again asked the same question, "What happened to the car?", the Arabic student paused thoughtfully. Later, Kleinmann confessed until this subject gave his answer, he had not paid much attention to the fact that his picture depicted a woman driver in the car and a male bus driver. "The car . . . ," the student began, "The woman backed into the bus!" Note how the student so deftly displayed avoidance of the passive as well as the belief that a male driver could not possibly be outperformed by a female counterpart! I mention these examples because they give us rare glimpses into how the mind of a language learner works. Experiments and experience can contain moments of magic – moments

of revelation which, if shared, can help us better understand our students, and ultimately make us better teachers. Learn to cherish research!

What about classroom practice? This important area has been richly represented by the program of each annual convention, and it is difficult to characterize the diversity of this domain concisely. I turn, therefore, to a phrase the current President of TESOL, Charles Blatchford, used a few years ago when he spoke at a colloquium my wife and I organized on English teaching in the People's Republic of China. He was in the middle of a two-year teaching stint in Gansu, a far western province, and so he was at the cutting edge, so to speak, of classroom practice. I thought he capably captured the very essence of all pedagogy when he said that he viewed all teaching as the building of *confidence* and *competence*. Whether you are from Lubbock, Texas, or Lanzhou, Gansu, that's the central concern, isn't it?—making our students confident and competent.

The innovations that we have seen in methods have, by and large, dealt with the question of confidence. Whether you attempt to employ an innovative audiolingual approach a la Rassias, a communally minded support group within the Counseling-Learning framework, an action-packed session of Total Physical Response, or the laid-back subconscious approach of Suggestopedia, all these new, humanistic methods are primarily designed to give your students a sense of self-esteem and confidence. Superficially, these methods appear to be very diverse—as disparate as the contrasting styles and personalities of the people who founded them, but it is important, no, it is crucial, that those of you who are new to the field should understand their commonality. Ironically, as Mark Clarke observed in his excellent *TESOL Quarterly* article on "Bandwagons," it is frequently the inexperienced teacher who is the most zealous advocate of a particular methodology (Clarke 1982). Though I harbor no ardor for any method, I would prefer that the situation were reversed in our search and re-search for confidence-building. I would prefer dispassion and disinterest in the young teacher, and fervor and commitment in the veteran. And lest the more experienced reader think I am ignoring you, I am one of you and I empathize with your situation. Samuel Johnson could have been writing about us when he chose to define a second marriage as a "triumph of hope over experience!"

But let us not forget competence. We hear a lot about competence nowadays, and we read a lot about it in our journals, in our teacher-training texts, and in the materials publishers provide us. Well, we should. Well, we should! Linguistic competence and communicative competence go together like love and marriage used to go together, and it is no accident that they are stressed in each successive TESOL Convention. There are additional competencies that we can examine however. In this age of computer technology, we must explore the appropriate uses of this important instrument in our classrooms. Obviously, before our students can be expected to display confidence and competence in CAI, we must possess these qualities first. This is why presentations like the paper by Canale and Barker (1984) of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education are so timely. Canale and Barker's closing remarks are worth repeating. "Nowadays," they conclude, "educators are continually asked to become computer literate. Equally important," they underscored, "is the need for people in computer technology to become educationally literate." Grow in your own professional confidence and competence and watch your students grow in their confidence and competence in English.

We need to look beyond research and beyond classroom practices though – we must also examine the larger geo-political arena of our discipline and the mutual dependence of EFL and ESL implied by our awkward name. Each year, I send a postcard to my parents from the annual conclave, and almost each year, I receive the same query back – would you explain just one more time what T-E-S-0-L stands for? What it stands for to those of you who are new members is the belief that we are all mutually dependent on one another. Even the popular dichotomies that are bandied about do not, to my mind, diminish the enormous overlap that teaching English as a foreign language and teaching English here in North America share. Take interference, for example. It supposedly plays a small role in language acquisition in the foreign language classroom and even a more insignificant role for the second language student, at least according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), but mother-tongue interference seems to be an important factor in all non-primary language acquisition. Papers presented at a colloquium at the Houston Convention on "interlanguage phonology" were just one source of corroboration for this longstanding claim. Recall again the composition error that I mentioned earlier which left the unfortunate impression that customers were losing their heads at a certain Japanese restaurant in California. The choice of *severed* for *served* could be purely overgeneralization in English morphology and/or English orthography, but it is impossible to rule out interference from the student's native Japanese. This error, the examples of Kleinmann, and countless other pieces of evidence show that there is a natural human tendency to retreat to what you know, when you encounter something new. For the beginning language learner, what is "known" and safe is the mother tongue. For the more advanced learner, the haven of retreat is what has recently been learned in the target language. It is no wonder that when we learn a *third* language, our most conspicuous problem is with intrusions from the second, not the first tongue. All of this leads me to believe that interference is an important and unitary phenomenon and, as defined here, can be treated in a similar fashion irrespective of the EFL or ESL situation in which the student is taught.

Besides interference, I would also claim that integration is a common theme for both EFL and ESL learners. We have grown comfortable with the position that integrative motivation is found almost exclusively in ESL classrooms whereas instrumental motivation is reserved for EFL situations. Certainly that traditional distinction is sometimes efficacious, but I think again that for newcomers to the field, it is best to be open-minded. From my experience teaching English in Thailand, and more recently in China, I can see the usefulness of calling these typical examples of TEFL as integrative situations. For the foreign scientist, engineer, or physician who will most probably never have direct contact with English speakers, English is still a means to integrate into a professional community. That sense of identification, communication, and belonging may not be quite as personal as the experiences of an ESL immigrant, but they are much more akin to integrative motivation than they are to instrumental. So I see our EFL and ESL colleagues sharing a common interest in the role of interference from a linguistic perspective and a common concern with integrative goals in terms of psychological motivation.

I have tried to cover three wide-ranging topics – from research to classroom activities to the curricular goals of EFL and ESL. There is much that is left untouched in this brief homily, but before I conclude, I would leave a few words

of valediction. Here I speak to you personally, not professionally. Half a decade ago, Aldous Huxley wrote a novel about the future of our planet which predicted, with chilling accuracy, the advent of genetic engineering. His title was purposely ambiguous because he wanted it to reflect both the satirical and the potential, both a world of antiseptic thought control and a place where the glorious promise of the human spirit might be achieved. His title then is my title. If we are to press forward in our common quest to create a brave new world for our profession, we would do well to heed Huxley's prophetic words. My favorite passage in the entire book is found in the Foreword, where he wrote, "This really revolutionary revolution is to be achieved, not in the external world, but in the souls and flesh of human beings." Too often we forget this simple truth. Too often, the world of TESOL is too much with us, and gaining and spending, we lay waste our sorrows!

Sometimes, it is our students who bring us back to our senses—who suddenly remind us once again that we are involved with what Stevick (1976) so propitiously phrased as the world inside and between people. Recently, when I was feverishly grading a set of intermediate ESL compositions, I had to put down the red pen and reflect for a moment at the captivating way one of my students managed to describe her hobby. I suddenly realized how important this activity was for her, and for so many others. This is what she wrote:

> I like to garden on some days more than others. When my day has been particularly busy, when I have been frustrated, when people have hurt me or made me mad, then, especially, I like to work in the yard. When I weed, I not only clean up my garden, but I clean away the ugly parts of my day. When I dig, I imagine what I would like to have said to some people, but I didn't, or I couldn't say it. Sometimes, I dig the soil with my thoughts. Spending my energy of the day on weeds and soil, I begin realizing that I am ready to recreate it with my new plants.

Despite the frenzy and fatigue that sometimes besets us in academia, I hope that you have found some plot in TESOL in which to till the soil, plant some seeds, weed, water, and wait. Sometimes, a brave new world is right at our fingertips.

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